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Pen Pictures

from our

New Mexican Mission Field

Twelve Thousand

The Woman's Board of Home Missions
of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.
156 Fifth Avenue, New York City

Pen Pictures from Our New Mexican Mission Field

OUT in the mountains of New Mexico nestles a little adobe village. It is built on a rocky ledge, on a lonely hillside overlooking a tiny mountain stream. To the front of this little village the mountains rise, one range above another, till their peaks are lost in snow and cloud. Behind it, also, are the mountains, and to the right and left opens out a pretty little canyon, beautifully wooded, through which a winding river flows. This little town is like one we read about of old—"beautiful for situation." It is only a quadrangle of ten or a dozen low houses, which might be taken for two or three instead of so many, were you not familiar with the Mexican custom of connecting their homes. Here are some fifty people, all relatives, making one large family, whose ancestors have made this place their home for eighty years. An old man lives there today who loves to tell how, long ago, he came there with his father when he was eight years old, and to relate the story of the years that followed. He points his visitors to some mounds above the village which are buried Indian Pueblos. These, he says, are much the same as when he played there in boyhood. Specimens of the pottery of that ancient people, and occasionally an Indian arrow, can still be found there.

Not far away are some old Spanish mines, and we realize that this spot was once the home of the gold seeker, as well as of the Indian warrior and hunter; and but a few miles away are cliff dwellings which lead us back still further into the past, and we are lost as we try to think how long this little spot has been known and loved by the human race. How long it has been the scene of life's joys and sorrows! We can understand

why it has been a coveted spot to each race—the scene of such strife and warfare. The fish in the stream, the game on the mountains drew the Indian; gold in the hillsides, the money-loving Spaniard; the fertile little valley attracted the Mexican.

Today every foot of land the valley offers is occupied by tiny gardens and orchards, and goats and sheep graze on the mountain slopes. The Mexicans love their home. It is a fascinating spot, though in many ways it has been a dark little corner. Life has been hard. Work as they would their living has been scant, their homes bare and cheerless, and few have ever learned to read or write. Little of the good news of the Gospel of Christ has come to them. Their ancestors, at some time, were taught by Jesuit priests, for a little chapel stands in the village there, to which a priest still comes once a year if his fee can be collected. But a knowledge of the beliefs and customs of this people shows how little of the True Light of Christ has entered into their life. They grope blindly after God and the way of salvation.

Some of these men pushed out from time to time in search of work and for purposes of trade. They saw other people and other communities and began to realize that there were better things in life than they had known, and to desire them for themselves and their children. They learned that these things were coming to others through Christian schools. One of these schools had been planted in a valley only five miles away, and news of the advantages and blessings this was bringing to their neighbors found its way to this quiet little village. An evangelist, too—one of their own people—had come to tell the people of Christ. Longing for the same privileges, they began making plans to send some of their own children to this same school, never doubting they would be received.

But money for books, tuition and clothes must be

provided, so some of the fathers and larger boys traveled far to look for work. How the aim in view lightened the labor! Two boys walked three hundred miles into Colorado, and found work as shepherd boys. Out under the burning sun, with seldom a retreat from its scorching rays, they watched their sheep. Up and down the mountains, in and out sandy arroyas, they wandered many miles in search of pasture and water. How patiently they led their flocks those long, long days! The little mite thus earned would mean so much of happiness for them the coming winter. The homecoming in the fall was joyous—all eager to hear and to tell the news.

Word had come up from the valley that a large, new schoolhouse had been built, with a strange-shaped roof, unlike their flat ones. Its board floors, many windows and wonderful doors that slid away out of sight and left one large room, or drew out again and made the one room into two, were a source of great wonder. The large bell that had been placed on the schoolhouse could be heard in their little town, calling, "Come, come, come."

Up the mountain road one morning two men went, as if in answer to that call. In many places the road had been dug out of the mountain side. Cliffs arose high above it on the one hand, while on the other the rocks fell away in a precipice. From the top of the mountain could be seen a wonderful panorama of beauty. Range after range of mountains, with tiny valleys between, stretched out on every side, while to the west, in the distance, flowed the Rio Grande. But these men thought little of these familiar scenes of beauty or of the dangerous descent of the mountain; they were intent on their errand; they were going to make arrangements for four boys to enter school. It was nearly noon as they entered the mission school, which had been dismissed for the intermission. They met the teacher on her way to dinner and made known their errand. First,

they asked questions about tuition and books; they were proud to be prepared to meet the expense of their children. Then they made known their wish to bring her the four boys. They had heard of her love and interest in the children. Would she not be glad? Glad! Watch the troubled light that comes into the eyes of this brave teacher as she looked up into the faces of these men, so confident of her sympathetic interest, and says: "I am so sorry, but the school is full and I cannot take any more children!"

No harder task comes to our teachers on the mission field than to refuse admission to boys and girls hungry for knowledge. But what else could she do? Already over sixty boys, besides twenty girls, were in attendance. There had been hope of help when so many were admitted, but news had come that the second teacher could not be granted that year. She must do the best she could and take no more pupils. She told the fathers how it was, and turned sadly away. They stopped her to plead that she take two boys—just two—and they would try to be satisfied; but she could not. When she passed out of sight they remained near the schoolhouse. How could they go home without a place in school for even one boy! One father could not give up. He went back to the plaza to find a new ally. The evangelist's wife had been a mission school girl. To her his Benito had come for help in Spanish, and she had given him a little start in English, also. Perhaps if she knew the story she could help somehow.

The evangelist's wife knew how bright and eager was this boy, and longed for this opportunity for him. She knew, too, the teacher's position, yet she went to urge that just this one boy more be taken. What could the teacher do? The Master's voice seemed to plead also for him. She sent back the message that she would take him and his companion as well. How joyfully that

message was received! Up to their homes these fathers went, and before nightfall they were back again in the valley with their boys and with the necessary articles for their meagre housekeeping. A room was rented and the next morning these boys of seventeen and eighteen —fine, manly looking fellows—were at school ready for their work. Before the first day was over the teacher had learned what a mentally hungry boy Benito was. At recess he stopped her with the words: "Teacher, I think I can pass this book very well." Open before him lay a Third Reader. She wondered at this, knowing that he had been helped with the First Reader only the year before, so she examined him here and there in the book and found he had taken the little help given him before and worked on by himself.

In the afternoon he asked for a history lesson. He had bought a book for himself and was eager, as so many of these boys are, to study the history of their country. He was placed in the class and other studies of his grade were added. In all he did good work and proved bright, quick and interesting in many ways. When an English Bible from the Christmas barrel was given to Benito a more grateful boy could not be imagined. As the teacher passed him he looked up with his usual bright "Good-morning," and said: "Teacher, how much could you sell this book for?" In his hand was a Spanish Bible.

Longing to add to his knowledge of English and to get all his new gift contained, he wanted this to help. She told him the price, and two dimes rattled quickly into her hand. In a few days his companion came to buy a Spanish Bible. Can you not picture the scene in the little, bare adobe room as these boys pored over God's Word together? Can you follow them back to their home in the little village I have described to you, with their four copies of God's Word? Has God

not promised to honor His word and to bring light and life through it?

In other ways, too, these boys were preparing to carry good news. A few days before they left school the teacher found Benito in his seat at work, as she often did, when she reached the school room. This time she found him writing in Spanish:

"I think when I read the sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
He took little children as lambs to His fold—
I should like to have been with Him then.

"And still to His footstool in prayer I may go
And ask for a share in His love;
And if I but earnestly seek Him below
I shall see Him and know Him above."

The truths taught in this hymn are much needed by his people. Could they be carried in a sweeter refrain? Benito loved and wished to learn. His teacher sang it with him, that he might learn the tune more perfectly, and then left him to his writing and turned to her work of preparing lessons; but some little girls in the center of the room caught it up, and soon the teacher became conscious of the fact that play had ceased, as though the bell had rung. The forty or fifty children were singing hymns, one after another, that they had learned since the mission school began. The little scene brought new hope to the teacher as she worked and listened, and she prayed that the little ones might lead many to the Light by their sweet singing.

The day came at last for Benito and his companion to leave school. They were reluctant to go, but it was time for field work again. A cordial invitation was given the teacher to visit in their homes, and plans were made for going the next week, when the evangelist was to visit their village with his family and hold service.

A hearty welcome awaited the little party on the appointed day. All the villagers stood in their doorways, as they had the morning some months before when the fathers went for the first time to the schoolhouse. A simple meal of chili, beans, bread and coffee was served with much kindly hospitality, and then all went up the hill to where the meeting was to be held. The boys had spread the news, and soon the room was crowded. It was an event to have the teacher come. With what deep interest they listened to the messages from God's Word that she and the evangelist brought to them! To many of them the story of Christ and His love was all so new. The evening was one not soon to be forgotten. "Come often!" and as the "good nights "were said the invitation was many times repeated.

From the meeting the visitors went again to Benito's home. The teacher and the evangelist's wife and the little ones were to stay for the night. The living-room was a bare, cheerless little place, furnished with a few homely chairs, a bed, a table and a fireplace in the corner. On the adobe floor were some sheepskin rugs and pieces of rag carpet, while a few pictures from advertising catalogues decorated the walls. This was about all, except a little bookcase, ornamented with Benito's initials in scroll work, which hung over the table. It contained his school books and his two Bibles. Father, mother and two boys made up this little family, and the visitors were not long in finding out that love beautified that home. These parents were proud of their boys; the boys quick to serve them.

It was quite late, but neighbors came in and talked ong in the night. The teacher was too tired to try and catch the Spanish conversation going on all about her, and a sense of loneliness swept over her as thoughts of home crowded in. She stole away to the fireplace to have a frolic with the little ones. Soon Benito joined

the circle and, putting the little catechism into her hands, which she had given him the week before, asked: "Could you hear me what I have learned?" She did not expect her task to be a long one, but she reached the fiftieth question before he faltered. A good week's work, was it not?

Just one more picture, and I am done. When the company had gone the mother began preparing for the night. I have said there was one bed; it proved to be many in one. Part was taken off for the evangelist's wife and little ones. This was spread on the floor near the fireplace. A little more was now taken for a bed for her boys in another corner; there was still enough left for the teacher and her little companion of the afternoon's drive. The poor little kitchen would be good enough for the husband and herself.

When all was settled for the night Benito slipped in, thinking all were asleep. He took down his books and studied for an hour or so before he sought his place by his brother's side. To one in that room sleep had not come quickly, and she had learned the secret of how this boy had done so much with so little opportunity.

From seven other such villages boys are enrolled in the same mission school—many of them equally bright and promising, eager to learn the language of their country and to make more of themselves and their lives. Loving parents stand back of them, proud of their progress and glad of each opportunity that opens for them. A hundred pupils could be accommodated in this school, with its two large rooms. Unless help can be granted for four months at least this next year half this number only can be taken. This will bring disappointment to many homes and opportunities of work for the Master will be lost. Ten other schools in the New Mexican field have just the same need, and many new communities are pleading for schools.

From among these children we hope for ministers of the Gospel and Christian doctors and teachers to help meet the needs of this people. As our work for Christ goes on, reinforcements should come from our Mexican mission field for our mission work in our other Spanish-speaking possessions. Our Home Mission Boards have already advanced beyond the apportionment of last year for home mission work, and is trusting in God and in the people of our Presbyterian Church to help them meet this increase. Shall we not only do this, but also make provision for a wider and more effective work?

As our General Assembly adjourned this year the watchword of that great body seemed to be, "Onward for the evangelization of the world for Christ." "Our Land for Christ" has long been the motto of our Home Mission Board. Each advance step in our mission school work will help us gain possession of our land for Him, and through this help us on to greater conquests.

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